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Fall 9-1-2005

PSC 595.01: Performance Measurement

Jonathan Tompkins

The University Of Montana, jonathan.tompkins@umontana.edu

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Political Science 595
Performance Measurement
Fall 2005

Instructor: Jon Tompkins
Office: LA 350
Email: jonathan.tompkins@umontana.edu
Tel: 243-5202

Course Description

Performance measurement is the process by which organizations routinely and systematically gather data to assess their progress in achieving their goals. Since the early 1990s it has been touted as the key to "managing for results" and "making public organizations more businesslike."

This course examines how to identify mission-related outcomes, develop indicators for measuring progress toward achieving those outcomes, and use the resulting data to improve the performance of government and nonprofit agencies. Students are asked to assess the current use of performance measurement in a specific government or nonprofit agency, program, or unit and develop a fully integrated performance measurement system for possible use by that agency, unit, or program.

Course Prerequisite

Students must have sufficient knowledge of a government or nonprofit agency/program to be able to design a performance measurement system for it, or at least the ability to obtain that knowledge quickly.

Course Objectives

1. To gain a better understanding of the nature and purposes of performance measurement systems and the ideological assumptions on which they rest.
2. To develop skill in designing a performance measurement system.
3. To draw personal conclusions about the value of such systems and whether their benefits outweigh their costs and technical limitations.

Required Text

Harry P. Hatry, Performance Measurement: Getting Results (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute Press, 1999).

Other assigned readings are available through Hard Copy and Electronic Reserve at the UM Library.

Course Requirements and Grading

Students are required to complete all readings assignments prior to class, submit “weekly” writing assignments, and present a final report of your proposed performance measurement system both orally and in writing at the end of the semester.

Note: These assignments require you to pretend you have been asked by a higher level administrator or board member to investigate and propose a performance measurement system for your program or unit (not the agency as a whole unless it is a small one). Consequently, it is to be written in the form of an internal, technical report, i.e. succinct and to the point. You are to make it as realistic as possible but you are not expected to submit it to your agency.

Each writing assignment involves rewriting the previous sections and adding a few additional sentences so that your technical report is a continuous work in progress. Your report will have an Introduction, a Body, and a Summary Analysis. The Body will simply explicate the outputs and outcomes that appear in the Logic Charts that you develop. Each of the 8 writing assignments is worth 10 points and the final report 100 points, resulting in the following grading scheme:

A = 167-180 A- = 162-166 B+ = 156-161 B = 149-155 B- = 144-148.

Weekly Assignments

Thurs., Sept. 8 An Introduction to Performance Measurement

Read Hatry's Preface and Chapter 1, and Osborne and Gaebler's chapter from Reinventing Government (Library Reserve). Be prepared to identify the organization or organizational unit for which you will develop a performance measurement system.

Thurs., Sept. 15 The Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) of 1993

Read the article by Radin on the GPRA (Electronic Reserve) and skim the strategic goals/measures in the Veterans Affairs 2004 Performance Plan at www.va.gov/budget/plan.

Thurs., Sept 22 Core Concepts in Performance Measurement

Read Hatry Chapter 2 and James Q. Wilson's "Types of Agencies" on Library Reserve. Be prepared to identify the "type" of your agency and potential difficulties in measuring its performance.

Writing Assignment #1. Write the Introduction to your Technical Report (1 or 2 paragraphs). You will want to introduce the purpose of the report by, for example, briefly defining the concept of performance measurement, citing a few of its advantages, and establishing the importance of exploring the value of such a system for your agency or work unit.

Thurs., Sept 29

Process Prerequisites and Agency Mission

Read Hatry Chapters 3 and 4, and submit Writing Assignment #2.

Writing Assignment #2. First, write an Introductory paragraph for your Section entitled "Outcome-Sequence Charts," which explains what these charts are and the roles they play in performance measurement. Second, determine how many core activities you carry out, and begin a chart for each, identifying a core activity in the first box in each chart. Third, begin the narrative for each chart, explaining each core activity in words (one paragraph).

Thurs., Oct 6

Identifying Outputs and Outcomes

Read Hatry Chapter 5, and submit Writing Assignment #3.

Writing Assignment #3: Continue developing your chart(s) by identifying your outputs and outcomes in appropriate columns and boxes (as shown on pp. 49, 51 and 52, making sure you have separate columns for activities and outputs), and by continuing your brief, narrative explanations of each output and outcome.

Thurs., Oct 13.

Identifying Measurable Indicators

Read Hatry Chapter 6, and submit Writing Assignment #4.

Writing Assignment #4: Identify appropriate measures for each output and outcome and include them on your chart(s) as shown on pp. 61-63. (No measure is needed for your Core Activity). Include workload and efficiency measures where appropriate (even though Hatry does not do so in his charts). Add a couple of sentences to each output and outcome in your narrative establishing how and why it makes sense to measure each in the way you propose.

Thurs., Oct 20

Gathering the Necessary Data

Read Hatry Chapter 7 and submit Writing Assignment #5.

Writing Assignment #5: Add a couple of sentences to each output and outcome in your narrative explaining how (and how often) the required data will be collected.

Thurs., Oct 27

Identifying Appropriate Indicator Breakouts

Read Hatry Chapter 8 and submit Writing Assignment #6.

Assignment #6: If it makes sense to break-out the data for each work unit, population group, etc., identify your breakouts and the logic behind breaking out the data in this way. (If it would be a waste of time to collect anything other than aggregate data, then simply explain your case).

Thurs., Nov. 3

Identifying Appropriate Performance Targets and Standards

Read Hatry Chapter 9, read the article "A Proper Mentality for Benchmarking" on Electronic Reserve; skim the benchmarks of Oregon's 2005 Benchmark Report (http://egov.oregon.gov/DAS/OPB/obm_pubs.shtml), and submit Writing Assignment #7. (If this link doesn't work, search for Oregon Shines and follow links to 2005 report).

Writing Assignment #7: For your most critically important outcomes, identify and explain the benchmarks/performance standards against which you will assess your state of excellence.

Thurs., Nov. 10

Reporting and Using Performance Data

Read Hatry Chapters 10 and 11, and submit writing assignment #8.

Assignment #8: This is a two-part assignment. 1) Add some language for each key output and outcome explaining how the data will be formatted/reported; 2) develop a summary analysis section (2-3 paragraphs) reviewing how the data will be used in your agency/work unit to close the gap between actual and desired performance.

Thurs., Nov. 17

Ensuring System Integrity

Read Hatry Chapters 13-15 (skipping chapter 12), and submit writing assignment #8.

Writing Assignment #8: Add language where appropriate, e.g., the summary analysis, indicating how you will ensure that potential threats to the integrity of the system are avoided. Hatry identifies several issues, but I am particularly concerned about the system becoming a hollow ritual, about data being used to threaten the agency with sanctions, about behaviors being skewed toward the few things that are measurable, about data being fudged to make you "look good", about the whole thing being a waste of time, etc.

Thurs., Nov. 24

Thanksgiving Holiday

Dec. 1, 8, and 15

Oral Reports

Be prepared to present your performance measurement system to the class on one of these dates. Your final written report will be due at the time you give your oral report.

The Final Report

This internal, tightly-written report is likely to come in at under 15 pages. It will draw upon your other writing assignments as needed to produce a fully integrated report regarding the performance measurement system you are proposing and how it will operate. At the close of your Summary Analysis, offer any conclusion you like, perhaps offering honest advice to your superiors about the potential advantages and disadvantages of such a system and whether you are prepared to recommend its adoption.